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DETROIT NEWS

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EPA hearings focus on plan by Ford to dump PCBs in mine

Opponents of site in Allen Park say they're tired of being industry's trash can.

By Said Deep
The Detroit News

At the request of residents in several western Wayne and down-river communities, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will hold public meetings tonight and Thursday night to discuss possible alternatives to Ford Motor Co.'s bid to dump mud laden with PCBs into its Allen Park clay mine.

Ford is seeking a permit for at least 33,000 cubic yards of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) in sediment that will be dredged from the River Raisin in Monroe. The EPA ordered Ford to clean up the river because its Monroe Stamping Plant empties into it.

If granted, the PCB permit would be the first of its kind in Michigan, and the only one approved anywhere in the United States in nearly a decade, according to federal officials.

PCBs, used as conductors in transformers and pneumatic sys-

tems in the 1950s, now are thought to cause cancer and birth defects.

Residents and city officials in Dearborn, Melvindale and southwest Detroit say they are tired of being the dumping ground for Michigan's industrial waste.

"There is a better method than depositing it in the landfill," said Melvindale Mayor Thomas Coogan. "I think we ought to destroy it on-site. We have been bombarded with Ford's waste for years."

Ford has listed six alternatives to using the landfill. But, at \$5.1 million, the landfill is the cheapest disposal method, the company said.

Brenda LiveOak of Lincoln Park, founder of the Oakwood Environmental Concern Association, a group leading the fight against Ford, said Ford and the EPA are deceiving area residents.

"They think they are dealing with a bunch of farmers who don't know the issues," said LiveOak.

The hearing will be at 7 tonight in the Monroe County Board of Commissioners auditorium, 125 East Second, Monroe. Thursday's meeting will be at 7 p.m. in the Melvindale High School auditorium, 18656 Prospect near Oakwood.

Clay mine hearing looks at options

Local site cheapest of 6 others

By Anne Runkle
Heritage Newspapers

ALLEN PARK — Nearby residents in this city and Dearborn have heard about Ford Motor Co.'s request to dispose of pollutants, including polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), in the Allen Park Clay Mine landfill.

Now they have an opportunity to learn what the alternatives are.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will hold two public hearings on other options the company may consider to dispose of PCB-contaminated sediment from the River Raisin in the Monroe area.

The first hearing will be 7 p.m. today at the Monroe County Courthouse annex, 125 E. Second St., Monroe followed by another at 7 p.m. tomorrow night

in the auditorium of Melvindale High School, 18656 Prospect, off Oakwood between Allen and Dix-Toledo in Melvindale.

PCBs were widely used as conductors in electrical transformers in the 1950s but now are thought to cause cancer and birth defects. PCBs are classified as toxic, so they fall under federal guidelines requiring a permit for disposal from the EPA.

RESIDENTS who live close to the clay mine in Melvindale and Dearborn's Snow Woods area have long believed the landfill is creating a health hazard and oppose Ford's request for permission to dispose of PCBs there.

The EPA has deemed Ford responsible for cleaning up the PCBs because the company's Monroe plant emptied into the River Raisin.

Ford officials have said the company never used the type of PCBs found in the river; another company owned the factory before Ford bought it in the 1960s.

At a hearing in May, opponents to Ford's plan said the EPA had not adequately examined alternatives.

The EPA now has compiled de-

Meeting

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scriptions and cost estimates of six alternatives to depositing the PCBs in the Allen Park landfill, bounded by Oakwood, I-94, Outer Drive and the Southfield freeway.

THE ALLEN Park option is the cheapest, at an estimated \$5.1 million. Other options, which include out-of-state landfill disposal, on-site treatment and incineration, range from \$15 million to \$54 million.

Cost is only one factor in deciding

how the PCBs should be handled, EPA spokesman Don de Blasio said. Another factor of great importance is the safety of the public, he said.

EPA officials said they believe the Allen Park landfill has natural qualities that make it a good place to dispose of PCBs.

No decision has been made about the River Raisin cleanup, de Blasio said, but Brenda LiveOak of the Oakwood Environmental Concern Association is certain the EPA's evaluations of alternatives are "slanted and prejudiced" in favor of Ford's request to dispose of the PCBs in the Allen Park landfill.

THE LINCOLN PARK resident, a longtime environmental activist, said the EPA is ignoring residents' concerns about their past exposure to hazardous materials and their unanswered questions about health effects.

Materials now classified as hazardous were disposed at Allen Park for decades before more stringent regulations went into effect.

A federal study concluded last year that the area had a higher than average occurrence of brain cancer, but said the landfill could not be pegged as the cause. A follow-up study is planned.

LiveOak said the EPA is not even considering a number of alternatives that could be employed to clean up the river.

If the EPA grants Ford's request, the company will be authorized to accept PCBs from other companies as well, for a fee. Ford officials have said they do not intend to do that.

Res'de ts: Do ' di ip 'C 3s

By Christy Strawser

Special Writer

MELVINDALE — "You're attempting to turn Downriver into a toxic dump."

That's what Mayor Thomas Coogan told representatives of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency during a hearing on the Ford Motor Co.'s Allen Park clay mine held Thursday evening at Melvindale High School.

Coogan's comment got a rousing response from the 220 people who attended the meeting and seemed to summarize the worst fears of the crowd.

The hearing was scheduled by the EPA to discuss alternatives to allowing Ford to take PCB-laden sediment from the bottom of the Raisin River in Monroe and place it into the landfill.

THE MEETING was conducted as a question-and-answer session and was attended by officials such as State Sen. George Hart (D-Dearborn), State Rep. Robert DeMars (D-Lincoln Park), Melvindale Chief of Police James Brophy and representatives of several environmental organizations.

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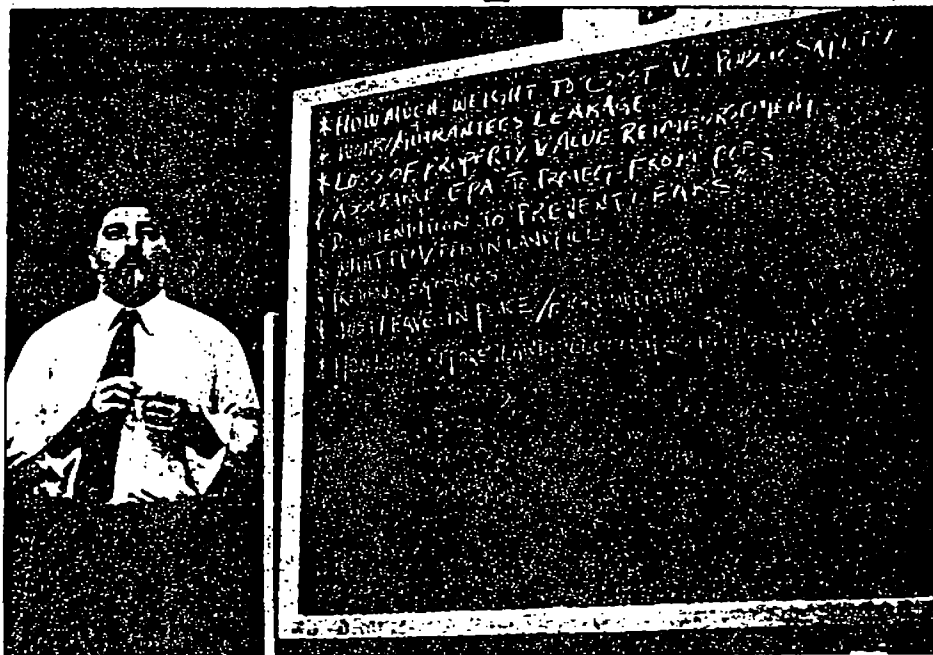


Photo by E.L. Conley

Don deBlasio, a representative of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, fields questions from Downriver residents about Ford Motor Co.'s request to dispose of pollutants in an Allen Park landfill.

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Hearing

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Janine Ansley, president of Melvindale Environmental Concerns Association (MECA) said she knows why so many angry people showed up for the meeting.

"We're fighting for our lives here and they make us feel like we're helpless, like we have no say," Ansley said.

Ford applied to the EPA for a permit to dump the sediment into the clay mine and the informal public hearings in Monroe and Melvindale were held last week while the agency considers the request and weighs all options.

Ford representatives feel the agency is not properly informing the public of all the benefits of using the clay mine option.

JEROME AMBER, the manager of wastes and hazardous substances

at Ford, said the clay mine option would create the "greatest overall environmental protection for the public" because it is the only alternative that allows the public the security of absolutely no exposure to the PCBs.

There are seven options being considered and all except the clay mine involve PCBs being destroyed by various means. The weakness of these options, Amber points out, is that the sediments would have to be stored on site until they could be transported to incinerators and would cause greater public exposure to the toxin.

If the clay mine is used, the sediment will be transported immediately and buried without the need for storage, he reasoned.

The clay mine proposal is also the least expensive option for Ford (\$5.2 million) compared to an estimated \$55 million for off-site incineration.

MANY AT the meeting felt that Ford made the clay mine decision based on its pocketbook, but Amber

disagreed and said that it would be a mistake for the public to connect least costly options with least protective.

Other environmental groups, such as the Sierra Club, have sided with the residents and determined that on-site destruction is preferable to moving the PCBs.

Ed Mcardle, chairman of the southeast Michigan Sierra Club wrote, "We are morally obligated not to put a price on human health."

"This would be a golden opportunity for Ford Motor Co. to benefit the ecology."

ANN MARSCHNER, the former MECA chairperson, said Ford is not looking ahead sufficiently and considering the long-term effects that PCBs in the clay mine would have on the population.

Marschner added that the PCBs should be destroyed because "there is no good reason for us to play toxic merry-go-round and leave PCBs for the next generation to deal with."

City protests Ford plan to dump PCB into clay mine

By Said Deep
The Detroit News

Ford Motor Co.'s plan to dump PCB laden mud into its Allen Park Clay mine could contaminate drinking water for thousands of west Wayne County and downriver residents, according to Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) officials.

"The DWSD strongly objects to the proposed permit to dispose of PCBs," DWSD Deputy Director Kathleen Leavey said in a letter to the federal Environmental Protection Agency. "Such an approval, as proposed will further the potential risks of contaminating the water supply."

Ford is seeking a permit to dump at least 33,000 cubic yards of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) in sediment that will be dredged from the Raisin River in Monroe. The EPA has ordered Ford to clean up the river because its Monroe Stamping Plant empties into it.

If granted, the PCB permit would be the first of its kind in Michigan. PCBs, widely used as conductors in transformers and pneumatic systems in the 1950s, now are thought to cause cancer and birth defects.

"We were never consulted on the planning at that site," Leavey said. "I am angry. We are very much in opposition to it."

"Despite any number of liners and caps on the landfill, there cannot be a guarantee that PCB material would not be discharged to the DWSD system," Leavey said.

EPA officials could not be reached for comment.

Residents and city officials in Dearborn, Melvindale, Allen Park and southwest Detroit say they hope concerns raised by DWSD will convince the EPA to consider alternative methods. Ford is pushing the landfill because, at \$5.1 million, it is the cheapest disposal method, opponents say. However, methods such as incineration are viable options, the opponents contend.

"This is another reason Ford shouldn't be allowed to do this," said Brenda LiveOak, founder of the Oakwood Environmental Concern Association, a community group from southwest Detroit that has led the fight against Ford. "This gives me hope."

Ford Motor Co. officials could not be reached for comment.

Communities fear PCB contaminants

By Christy Strawser

Special Writer

Two powerful new allies have joined the fight to derail a Ford Motor Co. proposal to dump 30,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment from the Raisin River in Monroe into Ford's Allen Park Clay Mine Landfill.

The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department and the Downriver Community Conference, a consortium of 16 Downriver communities, oppose plans to use the clay mine as a receptacle for sediment that contains polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).

The contaminants can be carcinogenic and are known to cause respiratory ailments.

Ford officials counter that the clay mine is well-insulated and PCBs would not be released into the environment.

THE DETROIT water department recently released statements indicating that PCBs would pose a greater contamination effect than previously considered because there is a city water main close to the clay mine on Oakwood Boulevard near Southfield.

"Since this landfill site is directly adjacent to our existing 54-inch water main, which supplies drinking water to a large population of our service area, the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department objects to the (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's) approval of the site for any PCB-contaminated waste disposal," wrote Kathleen Leavey, deputy director of the Detroit utility.

Gopal Roy, an engineer for the city of Detroit, said it is a weighty contamination threat.

"Everyone knows how much water mains break," Roy said. "And if this area were contaminated with PCBs, not only would the people who have to drink the water be threatened, but all the city employees who have to go out

and repair the leaks would be in danger of contamination."

MELVINDALE Mayor Thomas Coogan said at a DCC meeting Thursday that the water main, which is 15 feet below ground, services the Detroit metropolitan area and communities directly north of Detroit, and although it is a fairly new pipe, there is always the potential danger of leaks developing.

"This pipe is big enough to drive a Jeep through," Coogan said. "One slip and we've all got a real problem."

PCBs in the landfill also would be costly for the Detroit water department.

"We would have to closely monitor and test the waterline far more than is currently required," Leavey wrote.

Another problem is that the water department is under orders from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to develop a mercury- and PCB-minimization program. Leavey said that obviously cannot be completed at the same time a huge new crop of PCBs is being introduced into the area.

FORD OFFICIALS do not believe the water department's contentions will force them to abandon their plan to dump PCB-laden sediment into the clay mine.

"We realize the DNR has set laws and regulations that govern these things, and we will fully comply with all these laws and regulations," said Jerome Amber, manager of wastes and hazardous substances at Ford's world headquarters.

"The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department has publicly expressed concerns without fully understanding all the issues," he added. "The entire thing is a non-issue because the clay mine would not leak, and

therefore, there could be no danger of contamination."

Coogan brought the landfill issue before the DCC at its meeting Thursday and requested that the issue be declared a regional emergency.

"This is a catastrophic situation, not just for Melvindale and Allen Park, but also for Detroit and Dearborn and all the hundreds of thou-

sands of people who this water main services," he said, convincing DCC members to declare the situation a regional emergency.

THE DCC will give the information to the Western Wayne Conference, a consortium of 18 communities that also could be affected, for consideration.